

# Australian pork industry - Shaping our future, leading by example

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## Summary

Good animal welfare practices are integral to the sustainability and productivity of the Australian pork industry. Australian Pork Limited (APL) is committed to investing in animal welfare research, and the knowledge and outcomes produced all feed into a system of continuous animal welfare improvement.

### Introduction

The Australian pork industry has been scrutinised from an animal welfare standpoint. Issues can include housing (gestation and lactation housing), husbandry practices such as tail docking and teeth clipping, and euthanasia and stunning management. Often anthropomorphic views can complicate how we perceive the welfare of our pigs and will detract from any robust scientific investigations. The Australian pork industry has taken a proactive approach to animal welfare through our continuous welfare improvement programs. Australia's pork industry and researchers have shown global leadership in the research conducted to assist in the transition from gestation stalls to group housing. Through the program 'Shaping Our Future' we aim to phase out gestation stalls by 2017.

### Shaping Our Future

Both APL and the Cooperative Research Centre for High Integrity Australian Pork (Pork CRC) have made significant investments into animal welfare research towards the goal of the 'Shaping Our Future' program to phase out gestation stalls by 2017.

A gestation stall confines the sow, allowing her to get up and down but not turn around. Sows were placed in gestation stalls for either the entirety of gestation or until pregnancy was confirmed (about 28 days post-mating). Gestation stalls were used to protect the sow from aggression from other sows thus avoiding injury and stress. Stalls can be likened to separate pens allowing the sow to be individually fed, watered and assisting individual sow care. In 2010, the Australian pork industry voted to voluntarily phase out gestation stalls by 2017. This decision was underpinned by decades of industry funded research into sow loose housing, with the change providing freedom of movement, from five days after mating, until one week before they are due to farrow.

Currently, our significant investment into R&D to investigate group housing management and,

championed by the Australian Pork Industry Quality Assurance Program (APIQ<sup>✓</sup>): Gestation Stall Free classification, has led to 68% of the breeding sows currently in Australia classified as gestation stall free with the majority of other producers planning to be gestation stall free by 2017.

### Welfare R&D

The Australian pork industry is assisted in maintaining high welfare standards through the implementation of research outcomes that address the needs of the animals and are in keeping with the expectations of the community. Over the past 5 years APL has invested in excess of \$1M in welfare to be at the forefront of innovative research.

APL's welfare R&D program, Welfare Interventions, includes the following key projects:

- Reducing and assessing the pain response associated with routine husbandry practices
- CO<sub>2</sub> stunning standards
- On-farm welfare assessment
- Environmental enrichment
- Development of welfare biomarkers and;
- Providing environments conducive to positive affective states

Husbandry procedures such as tail docking cause a transitory pain response which may lead to welfare consequences. Through this project we are investigating methods to reduce and assess the acute pain of tail docking and, to understand the causative factors leading to tail biting to then be able to reduce the need to tail dock.

Humane methods of slaughter, to satisfy both meat quality standards and also consumer expectations, is a nationwide project working with key industry partners. Carbon dioxide stunning is the most common method of slaughter for pigs in Australia and Europe and there is a need to develop standard operating procedures associated with CO<sub>2</sub> stunning that safeguard animal welfare outcomes. The humane euthanasia of pigs is a required practice from birth to

sale. Farm euthanasia protocols must ensure that selected procedures are able to be conducted as soon as possible, to reduce any undue welfare impacts. Therefore, to assist stock people we are developing Standards for Humane Euthanasia and Stunning of pigs, from birth to sale.

On-farm welfare assessments for producers to be able to assess a pig's welfare and to be able to readily identify when a pig is experiencing compromised welfare is being developed with producers nationwide.

The environment of a pig pen can be considered to be lacking in stimulation and through the provision of environmental enrichment we can possibly maximize the number of positive experiences for our pigs. However, what constitutes enrichment for pigs and leads to long-term positive experiences over the lifetime of a pig, needs to be investigated.

To be able to quantifiably assess the welfare of our pigs and whether they are in a positive or negative affective state has the ability to transform our Australian pork industry. This is why we are investigating the use of multiple welfare biomarkers to assess pain or stress and, identifying practices and environments which are conducive to a positive affective state, over the lifetime of the pig.

#### **Extension Priorities**

The industry has a duty of care to the animals we are raising and expects that APL will provide research outcomes that assist producers to continue to improve animal welfare on farm. ProHand Pigs for a long time provided the means to train staff and inform them about pig welfare and the impact that their behaviour has on pigs. The ProHand Pigs program and delivery platform has been upgraded with ProHand Pigs 2.0 ensuring that training and assessment can now occur on farm.

One of the biggest issues that affect the agriculture sector in general is the continued and growing gap between the consumer and the producer. Alarming statistics were found that Australia's youth did not know where their food and fibre came from. APL took the initiative to develop educational units that can be used from junior primary to high school level, informing and educating the youth of Australia on the practices and sustainable initiatives of the Australian pork industry. Industry educational resources are now being used in greater than five hundred schools across Australia.